

ASCENSION ISLAND GOVERNMENT

Clerk of Council's Office
Ascension Island
South Atlantic Ocean
ASCN 1ZZ



pa.admin@ascension.gov.ac

+ (247) 67000 ext 100

www.ascension.gov.ac

Informal meeting of the Ascension Island Council

1630 on Thursday 14 January 2021 at the Court House

MEETING SUMMARY

Present:	HH Sean Burns, Administrator Gareth Morris, Director of Resources Rob Cheeseman, Crown Counsel	[by phone]	Councillor Andrew Ellick Councillor Kitty George Councillor Alan Nicholls
In attendance:	Xander Halliwell, Head of Administrator's Office Diane Baum, Director of Conservation and Fisheries Siobhan Stewart, Clerk of Council	Apologies:	

The Administrator welcomed all parties and thanked the Director of Conservation and Fisheries, Diane Baum, for attending to provide an update on the **Marine Protected Area (MPA)**.

The Administrator thanked the Head of the Administrators Office (HoAO), Xander Halliwell for his hard work in the role of Acting Administrator in his absence. Due to the Administrator undertaking arrival isolation, he requested that the HoAO chair the meeting whilst the Administrator remained on the phone. Councillors agreed.

The matters arising were addressed via the actions tracker and current topics discussed were as follows:

- **Animal Welfare [pets]:** This would remain on the tracker until more information was known about the future flight schedule.
- **Capital Projects:** These will be managed within the Finance Committee.
- **Illumination of Flags:** Faulty equipment has since been identified at the Naval Flag Staff, with remediation plans in place. A works order has been raised to fit a small flood light at the Administrators building to provide illumination for the Ascension Island flag.
- **AIG switchboard:** This will now be managed within the Finance Committee.
- **Public works Committee:** Membership to be addressed following a successful by-election on 04 March 2021. In the meantime the Director of Operations and Facilities will be requested to attend the next Formal meeting to provide an update regarding Public Works, with the suggestion that the CSSF Project Surveyor could also attend to provide an update on the CSSF project plans.
- **Single-use Plastics:** Policy Officer will provide a consultation response to Council.
- **Mental Health:** A mental Health working group has now met which includes the Senior Medical Officer, Social Worker and Community volunteers. Further information will be shared by that group in due course. Further discussion was had around options of Liaison support available to employees during quarantine periods, the HoAO agreed to communicate with the other Employing Organisation to confirm what provisions are available and provide feedback to Councillors.
- **COVID19 Public Information Meeting:** A public meeting will take place as part of the communications plan for the vaccine roll out.
- **Street Lighting in Georgetown:** A physical survey of street lighting in Georgetown was completed in January 2021, resulting in priority areas being reassessed. Temporary lighting in the form of portable solar lights set in precast concrete bases have been placed at Cuba, as well as the road along Zymotic to Deadman's beach, and the bin house area next to the tennis courts.
- **Rodent Mitigation actions:** Environmental Health have observed a decrease in rat numbers across the island, although continuing feedback from the public is welcomed. Current mitigation measures such as baiting and trap laying will continue. The Director of Conservation and Fisheries requested that concerns are reported

through the AIG helpdesk as this allows close monitoring of KPI's.

- **Daily checks by Police during quarantine period:** The Police have confirmed they have tightened their protocols and have additionally added their mobile numbers to the isolation instruction letters.
- **Proposed dates of an Employment Reform Working Group (ERWG) meeting to be distributed:** Proposed date had been given to Councillors of 16 December 2020.
- **Consolidate Employing Organisations feedback and distribute to Council:** Meeting took place on the 16 December 2020, with the document provided.
- **Public Health (Coronavirus)(Temporary Provisions) Regulations- 23(a)2 to be amended to reflect everyone:** A letter responding to Council's request was provided to Council on 06 January 2021.
- **Replace Union flag at Naval Flagstaff:** Flag has now been changed.
- **Provide a further update on the oxygen machine at the hospital:** It was confirmed that the oxygen generator is currently working with a flow rate of >85%. The specification for the machine is 93% +/- 3%. The 'missing' 5% flow is due to some fine tuning of the inlet pressures which is ongoing, however at 85% the generator provides the full capacity Ascension requires. Councillor Ellick requested that some clarity is provided regarding ventilator capacity on the island, the HoAO agreed to liaise with the Senior Medical Officer and provide an update to Council at a later meeting.
- **Confirm Hospital Manning over the festive period:** A public notice was distributing advising the festive period hospital manning plan. Councillors conveyed their disappointment that the hospital was not manned over the festive period, despite Councillors raising concerns at a previous Council meeting. Further transparency was requested regarding the policy regarding manning at the hospital generally and potential impacts on response times.

The Director of Conservation and Fisheries began by providing an update on the public consultation feedback on the Marine Protected Area (MPA) Management Plan, whilst noting her thanks to Councillor Nicholls for his thorough review and feedback of the draft plan. The DoCF provided a summary of feedback received from both on island and internationally, Council expressed their contentment in the responses to the feedback provided by the DoCF. A summary of feedback received as well as the responses during the public consultation period will be provided to the public via the AIG website.

An update was provided regarding the funding to support the MPA management plan, confirming that an indication of commitment has been received from the UK Governments Blue Belt Programme that should provide assurance of funding up to 2024, highlighting that this will allow a 3 year period to consider future funding following 2024. All members of the Council agreed that if such funding were confirmed from the UK Government, then they would be able to recommend implementation of the MPA management plan. DoCF agreed to return to Council with an updated draft of the MPA Management plan, draft associated legislation and a commitment of funding from the UK Government for the Council to consider a recommendation to the Governor. Councillor George suggested that consideration be given to a memorial in the memory of Kate Downes for her contribution, hard work and research towards the Marine Protected Area, the DoCF agreed this was an excellent idea, confirming she will make contact with Kate's family.

The HoAO provided an update about **coronavirus** (COVID-19) on Ascension. With the Island recently experiencing its first case of an individual with an active virus, the HoAO was pleased to confirm the island had returned to Level 1 Amber following two negative test results. Further discussion was had regarding the different alert levels and whether a review was required as there were concerns that the current process was causing some confusion, the HoAO agreed to review and provide feedback.

The HoAO was pleased to inform Council that the FCDO has confirmed that doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine is expected be sent to Ascension Island in February 2021. In the meantime a thorough communications plan will take place to ensure people can make an informed decision as to whether they wish to receive the vaccination or not. Once responses have been collated following the vaccination survey, a response will be returned to the Council. Some discussion was had around the movement between Saint Helena and Ascension Island following the vaccine roll out.

An update was provided on the **Public Health (Coronavirus)(Temporary Provisions) Regulations 2020**, following Councillors feedback. A change in policy for pre-release testing for those in quarantine on Ascension Island now

applies to everyone 11 years old and over, although this has been in place for runway contractors since their arrival.

The HoAO provided information regarding a request from the RAF regarding a planned flight coming from the Falkland Islands with crew and 1 passenger, explaining that the crew will make no fuel stops and have been in the Falkland Islands for over 14 days, a location where there are no community cases of coronavirus. Therefore after consideration, the Senior Medical Officer had assessed that there was no risk to the community of Ascension Island, allowing the crew and passenger to waive the quarantine period. Crown Council added that the AIG has no legal power to isolate in this instance as there are no reasonable grounds to suspect that the persons travelling are infected or contaminated with coronavirus. Councillor Ellick opposed waiving the quarantine period in this instance. Further conversation was had around whether there was a possibility to transport Saint Helenians stranded in the Falkland Islands to Ascension Island, as well as the need for communications to the public informing them of the decision to not isolate.

The HoAO provided an update on the **runway project**. He confirmed that things are progressing well, with the boatyard area near completion, the next phase of the runway works is beginning. Subject to the AIG's approval, offloading of the aggregate is expected to begin on Monday 18 January 2021, lasting until around the end of the month. Assurance was given that the FIRS ship expected to arrive on 01 February 2021 will take priority should there be any delays with the SLNC Severn 1 vessel. Further discussion was had regarding the need for ongoing community engagement with the runway contractors and a follow up public meeting following the first offload. Clarity was provided regarding the day to day working hours of the runway contractors, Monday to Friday 0700 to 1730, Saturday 0800-1730, with any additional working hours requested and considered on an ad hoc basis. Further information was also provided regarding Schuyler supporting boat owners getting to their boats not only on weekends, but also on week days.

The Director of Resources (DoR) provided an update on the **Budget and Business Levy**. The DoR reported that following the Finance Committee held on 13 January 2021, there is a plan to have a budget in place ready for recommendation to the Governor around the first week of March 2021. He confirmed Employing Organisations have all paid their business levy, with further discussion regarding a potential freeze of business levy after a 27% increase in 2020 and what impacts it may have.

The HoAO confirmed the **by-election** was planned for the 04 March 2021 and that the nomination period will open on Wednesday 27 January 2021. Councillors were reminded that the deadline for nominations was the 17 February 2021.

There were no items of **other business**:

The meeting closed at 19:07

Siobhan Stewart
Clerk of Council